

Death of a naturalist: a study of seamus heaney?s



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

first book of poems.

Death of a Naturalist: A study of Seamus Heaney's first book of poems.

Seamus Heaney, the famed Irish poet, was the product of two completely different social and psychological orders. Living on "a small farm of some fifty acres in County Derry in Northern Ireland" (Nobel eMuseum), Seamus Heaney's childhood was spent primarily in the company of nature and the local wildlife. His father, a man by the name of Patrick Heaney, had a penchant for farming and working the land. Seamus' mother Margaret, in contrast, was a woman born into a family called McCann, who's major dealings were with business dealings, trade and "the modern world" (Nobel eMuseum). Patrick Heaney was a man of few words, and preferred the quiet life of a farmer to the vocal world of trade and industry. Margaret Heaney was in fact quite the opposite and believed in speaking out, being heard and was seldom shy in expressing her feelings (Nobel eMuseum). These two extreme contrasts were enormously influential in the shaping of Seamus as a man and as a poet, and his first book *Death of a Naturalist* is a testament to this. *Death of a Naturalist* focuses on nature and wildlife as well as human emotions, and using poetry as his medium, Seamus Heaney shows his readers with specific reference to love and death, the images of nature that are associated with his father, and intertwines them with the human feelings and emotions that are closely linked with his mother.

Love is a prominent theme in Seamus Heaney's first book of poems, and it is worthwhile noting that just one year after Heaney married the love of his life,

a woman named Mary Devlin, that Heaney wrote and released *Death of a Naturalist* (Nobel eMuseum). It might be confusing for one to imagine a relationship between the wild and natural world and a human characteristic such as love, but Seamus Heaney manages to bring the two themes together in a deeply poetic and fitting fashion.

In the poem *Twice Shy*, love is the governing premise. *Twice Shy* revolves around the idea of new lovers playing a game of hunter and the hunted, and with references to both nature as well as human emotions, Heaney displays the influences that were instilled in him as a young man by his parents. In the second stanza, the influence is unmistakable as Heaney describes a situation in which two lovers are trying to conform to the traditions of courting, but are consumed by desire in an almost untamed and feral way: "A vacuum of need / Collapsed each hunting heart / But tremulously we held / As hawk and prey apart, / Preserved classic decorum, / Deployed our talk with art." (Heaney 33). The "hawk and prey" belong together, and while it is not exactly what one might call a symbiotic relationship, it is the way nature works and it is accepted as a sometimes harsh but absolutely essential part of life. There is a "vacuum of need" when couples cannot join together, and by associating the natural world with the longing for love and the freedom of expression that lovers yearn for, Heaney perfectly encapsulates the two wholly diverse sides of his nature.

Another example of a love theme being combined with the natural tendencies of Seamus' father, as well as the emotional and human side of his mother can be found in the poem *Saint Francis and the Birds*. This poem, consisting of four stanzas, tells the story of Francis "preaching love to the

birds" (Heaney 42) and the effects that his words have on the winged creatures. Using three lines for each stanza and with only one line for the final stanza, Heaney keeps this poem clear and concise; much like his father would have preferred to do. The concept of a man proclaiming words of affection to animals is interesting enough, but upon close examination of the poem once can see a greater complexity within the lines. Heaney's descriptive mention to the reaction of the flock, leads the reader to realize even further how Patrick and Margaret Heaney had influenced Seamus as a man,